

JUN 18 1936

FOREIGN POLICY REPORTS

June 15, 1936

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Origins of the Locarno Crisis

BY VERA MICHELES DEAN

PUBLISHED TWICE A MONTH BY THE

Foreign Policy Association, Incorporated

EIGHT WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

VOLUME XII NUMBER 7 25¢ a copy \$5.00 a year

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with the aid of the Research Staff of the Foreign Policy Association

WHEN German troops reoccupied the Rhineland on March 7 in violation of the Versailles and Locarno treaties, Hitler took an important step toward securing the free hand in Eastern Europe which he had advocated in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*.¹ The Leader claims territory in Eastern Europe on two counts: to effect the racial unity of all German-speaking peoples, including Austria and the German minority in Czechoslovakia; and to destroy communism which, according to Hitler, threatens European civilization, and at the same time rules the Ukraine, rich in grain and mineral resources—already occupied by Imperial Germany during the World War. Most observers believe that Nazi objectives in Eastern Europe cannot be achieved without successive conflicts, which it will prove impossible to localize. Such localization has been made particularly difficult by the Franco-Soviet and Soviet-Czechoslovak pacts of mutual assistance, which provide for French aid to the Soviet Union and Soviet aid to Czechoslovakia in case of German aggression. This mutual assistance system, designed to block Germany's eastward expansion, was the immediate pretext for Hitler's denunciation of Locarno. Yet the *Fuehrer*, while refusing to participate in an Eastern European security system, has not officially abandoned his aims as expressed in *Mein Kampf*.

The questionnaire submitted to the German government on May 8 by Sir Eric Phipps, British Ambassador in Berlin, marked one more step in the series of British attempts to ascertain Hitler's plans for the future of Europe. The British Foreign Office has been addressing substantially the same questions to Germany for a whole year, and has as yet received no satisfactory answer. To the Franco-British suggestion, first made in July 1934, that Germany should join a multilateral pact of mutual assistance comprising

all countries in Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, the Hitler government first replied with qualified refusal, then with counter-proposals for a multilateral non-aggression pact shorn of all provisions for mutual assistance to the victim of aggression. The German counter-proposals—first interpreted by Hitler as permitting the conclusion of mutual assistance pacts between other Eastern European states—were whittled down after publication of the Franco-Soviet pact in May 1935 to an offer of bilateral non-aggression pacts between Germany and "neighboring states"—a phrase whose geographical scope was never clearly defined by Hitler, beyond the general intimation that it could not include the Soviet Union. All British inquiries regarding Germany's intentions in Eastern Europe, which grew more pressing as time went on, were waved aside in Berlin with references to the "holiday season," the Nuremberg party congress of September 1935, the Italo-Ethiopian crisis, and the effects of the Franco-Soviet pact on the European situation. An analysis of these diplomatic negotiations is essential to an understanding of the Locarno crisis precipitated by Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland.

EASTERN LOCARNO NEGOTIATIONS

Plans for an Eastern security pact were first formulated in the autumn of 1933, when the Soviet government proposed the conclusion of a Franco-Soviet pact of mutual assistance. France was then reluctant to give the U.S.S.R. a pledge of unlimited mutual assistance which, on the one hand, might have involved it in Soviet controversies with Japan and, on the other, might have proved incompatible with the Locarno Treaty. It also wanted its allies in Eastern Europe—notably Poland—to benefit by such guarantees of security as the Soviet Union might offer France. In the course of negotiations between M. Barthou, French Foreign Minister, and M. Litvinov, Soviet Foreign Commissar, it was agreed that the proposed pact should embrace

1. Vera Micheles Dean, "The Soviet Union as a European Power," *Foreign Policy Reports*, August 2, 1933; Mildred S. Wertheimer, "The Aims of Hitler's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Reports*, June 5, 1935.

FOREIGN POLICY REPORTS, VOLUME XII, NUMBER 7, JUNE 15, 1936

Published twice a month by the FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION, Incorporated, 8 West 40th Street, New York, N. Y., U.S.A. RAYMOND LESLIE BUELL, *President*; WILLIAM T. STONE, *Vice President and Washington representative*; VERA MICHELES DEAN, *Editor*; HELEN TERRY, *Assistant Editor*. *Research Associates*: T. A. BISSON, VERA MICHELES DEAN, HELEN H. MOORHEAD, DAVID H. POPPER, ONA K. D. RINGWOOD, CHARLES A. THOMSON, M. S. WERTHEIMER, JOHN C. DEWILDE. Subscription Rates: \$5.00 a year; to F. P. A. members \$3.00; single copies 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter on March 31, 1931 at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

all countries in Eastern Europe, including Germany; that it should be concluded within the framework of the League of Nations, which the Soviet Union was to join; and that the pledge of mutual assistance should operate only in Europe, and not in the Far East.^{1a}

This Franco-Soviet project was submitted to the British government on June 27, 1934, and discussed on July 11-12, when M. Barthou conferred in London with Sir John Simon, British Foreign Secretary. Although deeply alarmed by fear of Nazi expansion in Europe, M. Barthou apparently demanded no additional guarantees of the continental *status quo* from Britain; he succeeded, however, in winning British support for a Franco-Soviet scheme of interrelated regional pacts providing for territorial guarantees and mutual assistance against aggression.² The most important of these was the so-called Eastern Locarno pact,³ which was to consist of two instruments: an eight-power treaty signed by the Soviet Union, Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, providing for joint consultation in case of crisis and immediate military assistance to any one of the contracting parties attacked by another; and a Franco-Soviet treaty, by which the Soviet Union, so far as France was concerned, was to accept the obligations of a guarantor of the Western Locarno on the same terms as Britain and Italy, while France was to acquire, with respect to the Soviet Union, the status of a signatory of the eight-power treaty. In other words, the U.S.S.R. was to aid France if the latter were attacked by Germany in the West, while France was to be called on for consultation and military assistance if the U.S.S.R. were attacked by Germany in the East. At Britain's suggestion it was agreed that the undertakings of mutual assistance assumed by France and the Soviet Union should extend to Germany as well.⁴

The British government officially endorsed the amended Eastern Locarno project on July 12, when

Sir Eric Phipps was instructed to inform the German Foreign Office that "the reciprocal character of the pact as now proposed is unexceptionable," and that Britain "earnestly" hoped Germany would participate in the pact. Germany, said Sir John Simon, "would now be on a footing of complete equality within the framework of the proposed agreements; and they follow exactly the Locarno model."⁵

The German government made no reply to this overture until September 10, when Prince von Bismarck, German Chargé d'Affaires in London, presented a memorandum on the subject.⁶ In this memorandum Germany pointed out that it had proved extraordinarily difficult "to introduce a collective pact system containing the obligation of automatic military assistance, which would in a crisis function justly and equally in regard to all parties." These difficulties would not be diminished if a system of sanctions comprising all or a large number of states were replaced by regional agreements. Germany, occupying a central situation "in the midst of heavily armed states," could not undertake to intervene in the conflicts of other countries. If it did, it would become "a battleground for all possible conflagrations in Europe." The Franco-Soviet treaty—supplementing the eight-power pact—was "an edifice which is neither called for or suggested by the natural requirements of the situation in Eastern Europe nor by any need for greater stability of the Locarno system." The German government believed that peace would best be served by the conclusion of bilateral agreements which could be adapted to "concrete circumstances," and would not involve the risk of "either remaining pure theories or of leading to complications." It did not, however, "reject altogether the idea of multilateral treaties." At the same time, it contended that "stress should not be laid on agreements to render immediate military assistance in case of war, but rather upon other methods of securing peace." The best guarantee of peace "will always be not to prepare for war against war, but to extend and strengthen the means calculated to prevent any possibility of an outbreak of war."

Germany's objections to an Eastern Locarno were echoed by Poland which, although accepting the project "in principle," feared it would break up the German-Polish friendship formed early in 1934, and subordinate Warsaw to the anti-German aims of France and the U.S.S.R. Nor did the Soviet Union's admission in September 1934 to the League of Nations—from which Germany had departed

1a. Speech of M. Flandin in the French Chamber of Deputies on February 25, 1936. France, *Journal Officiel, Débats Parlementaires*, Chambre des Députés, 15e Législature, Session Ordinaire de 1936, 26e Séance, p. 579.

2. Cf. Vera M. Dean, "Europe's Struggle for Security," *Foreign Policy Reports*, June 19, 1935.

3. For text, cf. Great Britain, *Correspondence showing the Course of Certain Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement, June 1934 to March 1936*. Miscellaneous No. 3 (1936), Cmd. 5143 (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), p. 7. When this British Blue Book was first published, the German press stated that it was not free from "tendentiousness" and created a false impression by abstracting British-German negotiations from other developments simultaneously occurring in Europe. Cf. *Deutsche diplomatisch-politische Korrespondenz* (Berlin), No. 88, April 22, 1936.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 7, Note 1; also M. Flandin's speech of February 25, 1936, cited.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

in 1933—improve the chances of a general security agreement in Eastern Europe.

Negotiations for an Eastern Locarno marked time until February 1-3, 1935, when the French and British Premiers and Foreign Ministers conferred in London, and issued a joint declaration embodying the main outlines of the new settlement they proposed for Europe.⁷ This settlement envisaged, among other things, conclusion of the Eastern Locarno pact, Germany's eventual return to the League, and a Western air pact between the Locarno powers—Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Italy—in which the signatories would undertake to give immediate aerial assistance to any one of their number which might be the victim of "unprovoked aerial aggression" by one of the contracting parties.

The German government answered the London declaration in a memorandum of February 14,⁸ in which it stated that it would examine the questions raised by France and Britain "as much in the spirit of a convinced desire for peace as with care for the security of the German Reich in its geographically particularly exposed position in the heart of Europe." Before taking part in general negotiations, however, the German government thought it desirable to hold separate conversations with Britain concerning "preliminary questions of principle." While the German reply was conciliatory in tone, it completely ignored the proposal for an Eastern Locarno, which formed an integral part of the London declaration. It was feared in Paris that the Hitler government, in direct conversations with Britain, might single out for negotiation the Western air pact, strongly favored by the British, and seek to drive a wedge between France and Britain. Germany's failure to mention the Eastern Locarno also alarmed the Soviet Union, which believed that in return for a Western air pact Britain might give the Reich a free hand in Eastern Europe.⁹

SIR JOHN SIMON'S VISIT TO HITLER

On February 21 Sir John Simon informed Sir Eric Phipps that, although the British government was not opposed in principle to an Anglo-German meeting, the object of such a meeting would be "not to isolate one topic to the exclusion of others," but to examine "the totality of matters" referred to in the London declaration.¹⁰ Germany promptly

acquiesced in this view,¹¹ and on February 25 Sir John announced in the House of Commons that, with France's approval, he would visit Berlin on March 7. This visit was postponed first by the publication on March 4 of a British White Paper on imperial defense, which aroused profound resentment in Berlin, and then by Germany's proclamation of rearmament on March 16.¹² On March 25-26, when the international flurry provoked by these events had somewhat subsided, Sir John Simon, accompanied by Mr. Anthony Eden, Lord Privy Seal, made a journey to Berlin which was supposed to be purely exploratory in character. On this occasion Chancellor Hitler "made it plain" to the British Foreign Secretary that Germany was not prepared to sign an Eastern pact of mutual assistance, particularly if it included the Soviet Union. What he favored was a multilateral non-aggression pact between Eastern European powers, providing for consultation in case of threatened aggression. The situation in Memel, however, prevented the inclusion of Lithuania in such a pact. Hitler suggested that, should hostilities break out between any two of the signatories of the proposed non-aggression treaty, the others should undertake not to support the aggressor in any way—adding in another connection that it would be difficult to identify the aggressor. "Asked as to his view if some of the other parties to such a pact entered into an agreement of mutual assistance as amongst themselves, Herr Hitler stated that he considered this idea was dangerous and objectionable, as in his opinion it would tend to create especial interests in a group within the wider system."¹³

Hitler's ideas regarding an Eastern pact were embodied in a note presented to Sir John Simon by Baron von Neurath, German Foreign Minister, on March 26.¹⁴ This note proposed that the Eastern European powers, "following up the fundamental ideas of the Kellogg pact," should conclude a 10-year treaty providing for non-aggression, arbitration and conciliation. Should one of the contracting parties believe itself threatened with aggression, a conference of all the signatory states would be immediately summoned to consider steps for the maintenance of peace. Should hostilities then break out between any two contracting powers, the others would undertake the negative obligation "not to

7. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

9. "Sovetskoe Pravitelstvo i Anglo-Franzuskoe Soglasenie" (The Soviet Government and the Anglo-French Agreement), *Izvestia*, February 21, 1935.

10. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 18.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

12. Dean, "Europe's Struggle for Security," cited.

13. Sir John Simon's statement in the House of Commons on April 9, 1935, regarding his visit to Berlin on March 25 and 26, 1935. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 20.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

support the aggressor in any way, neither economically nor financially nor in a military way"—but would not be obliged, as provided in the Franco-Soviet project for an Eastern Locarno, to give military assistance to the victim of aggression.¹⁵

THE EASTERN PACT AT THE STRESA CONFERENCE

When Sir John Simon reported the results of his "exploratory" Berlin visit to the French and Italian representatives at the Stresa Conference, which met on April 10 to consider League action on German rearmament, he was asked the following question: Should Hitler's objection to a multilateral Eastern pact of mutual assistance be interpreted as refusal to join a treaty such as that outlined by von Neurath, if this treaty was supplemented by mutual assistance pacts between the other signatories?¹⁶ Sir John Simon, on April 11, asked Sir Eric Phipps to elucidate this "simple but important point," adding he would "much regret it" if one of the conditions of Germany's participation in an Eastern treaty was that other countries in that region should abstain from concluding supplementary mutual assistance pacts. "Indeed," he said, "it will be widely felt that the fact that Germany is not prepared to enter into a pact of mutual assistance is not a justification for insisting that other parties to [the] Eastern pact should not do so."¹⁷

Germany's reply, in the form of a communication released for publication in the German press on April 14, was transmitted by Sir Eric Phipps on April 12.¹⁸ The kernel of this reply was the tortuous statement that just as Germany was "unable to join any pact which contains . . . military engagements as an essential element of its contents, and therefore of its existence, so can agreements [of mutual assistance], which lie outside this pact, not deter the German government on its side from concluding pacts of non-aggression" such as that outlined by von Neurath on March 26.

On the basis of this statement, Sir John Simon informed the French and Italian representatives at Stresa on April 12 that Germany was now prepared to enter into an Eastern pact, "notwithstanding the fact that some of the other parties might conclude arrangements for mutual assistance, provided that such arrangements were embodied in absolutely

separate documents."¹⁹ M. Laval, the French Foreign Minister, said with obvious relief that this cleared up the situation. "France," he declared, "now had latitude to make with Russia a bilateral arrangement of mutual assistance without hindering the negotiation and conclusion of a multilateral pact of non-aggression." This was all the more agreeable to the French government, he added, since it had already undertaken to conclude a mutual assistance pact with the Soviet Union. He promised to give Britain and Italy the main lines of this pact, although its precise terms had not yet been fixed. Sir John Simon expressed the hope that whatever arrangement was being negotiated by France and the Soviet Union "would be carried through in such a way as to make it plain that it was not outside Geneva and the League of Nations, but within the framework of the Covenant." M. Laval reassured the British Foreign Secretary on this point.²⁰

On April 18, when the British had as yet received no information regarding the contents of the Franco-Soviet pact, Sir John Simon instructed Sir George Clerk, British Ambassador in Paris, to secure this information from M. Laval.²¹ The British Ambassador reported on April 19 that M. Laval had agreed to communicate the text of the pact after it had been initialed, but before it was made public. On April 26 Sir John Simon, with some anxiety, telegraphed Sir George Clerk that Britain's Locarno obligations "give us a very real and direct interest in the terms of the proposed Franco-Soviet agreement." It would be wise, under the circumstances, "to let M. Laval know frankly at this stage the exact nature of our preoccupation, i.e., that France should not be induced to subscribe to any agreement which might oblige her to go to war with Germany in circumstances not permitted by Article 2 of the Treaty of Locarno."²² Sir George Clerk was told by the Quai d'Orsay on April 27 that Britain might rest fully assured on this point. France had made it "an absolute condition" that the Franco-Soviet pact "must be subordinated not only to the working of the Covenant but also to that of the Locarno treaty."²³

THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

On May 2, following complicated negotiations in the course of which the Soviet Union had demanded a pledge of automatic assistance which

15. For analysis of Mr. Eden's subsequent visits to Moscow and Warsaw in March-April 1935, cf. Dean, "Europe's Struggle for Security," cited, pp. 100-101.

16. Telegram addressed by Sir John Simon to Sir Eric Phipps from Stresa on April 11, 1935. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 21.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

19. British-French-Italian conversations at Stresa, Extracts from Notes of the Meeting held April 12, 1935, *ibid.*, p. 24.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

France had refused to give, the two countries signed a five-year pact of mutual assistance intended to supplement their obligations under the League Covenant.²⁴ The pact provides that, if either party is threatened with or in danger of attack by a European state, they will immediately consult regarding measures for the enforcement of Article X of the League Covenant. Should the League Council fail to reach a unanimous decision regarding a dispute "likely to lead to a rupture," and should either France or the U.S.S.R. be then subjected to unprovoked aggression by any European state, whether member of the League or not, the two countries undertake to come immediately to each other's assistance.

A protocol of signature attached to the pact limits application of the mutual assistance pledge to cases of aggression involving violation of French or Soviet territory. It also provides that the obligations of the pact shall not be carried out in any way inconsistent with existing treaty obligations—a reference to the Locarno Treaty.²⁵ The protocol of signature, moreover, declares that negotiations for the Franco-Soviet pact were intended to complete a security agreement comprising all countries of northeastern Europe, including Germany, Poland and the Baltic states "neighbors of the U.S.S.R."²⁶⁻²⁷

CONFLICT OVER FRANCO-SOVIET PACT

On May 2—the day the text of the Franco-Soviet pact was published—Mr. MacDonald, British Prime Minister, told the House of Commons that "it is specially in the power of Germany to make a valuable contribution to the system of security" in Eastern Europe. While regretting that Germany was not ready to participate in a multilateral pact of mutual assistance, he said that Hitler's March 25 proposal for a non-aggression treaty "ought not to be allowed to drop, and we trust that Germany herself will take immediate steps to promote in more concrete shape the idea which her Chancellor has formulated." He saw no reason why the treaty proposed by Hitler "should not harmonize" with the Franco-Soviet pact; on the contrary, he thought that "the two can very well supplement each other, and thus help towards creating a system of collective security in Eastern Europe."²⁸

24. For text, cf. France, *Journal Officiel de la République Française, Lois et Décrets*, May 17, 1936.

25. Cf. p. 91.

26-27. For analysis of Soviet-Czechoslovak pact of mutual assistance concluded on May 16, 1935, cf. Dean, "Europe's Struggle for Security," cited, p. 103.

28. Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, Fifth Series, Vol. 301 (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1935), p. 571.

In explaining Mr. MacDonald's speech the next day to Herr von Hoesch, German Ambassador in London, Sir John Simon said that the British felt it was not enough for Hitler to declare in general terms that Germany was prepared to negotiate a multilateral non-aggression pact in Eastern Europe; by taking positive and concrete action in formulating such a pact Germany "would do a great deal more to show that she was contributing something to security than by merely putting herself on record in vague phrases."²⁹

A week later, on May 10, von Hoesch told Sir John Simon that while the Franco-Soviet pact provided for mutual assistance without specifying the identity of the aggressor, the protocol of signature clearly showed it was directed against Germany alone.³⁰ The phrasing of the pact was therefore "hypocritical" and "designed merely to produce the impression that it was not a military alliance against Germany." The Ambassador's personal view was that the pact was not compatible with the Locarno Treaty. Sir John Simon, in reply, said he could not agree with this view; the Franco-Soviet pact, in his opinion, "seemed to have no effect at all upon the provisions of the Locarno Treaty." In conclusion, he urged Germany to submit proposals for a Western air pact.

The official Nazi view of the Franco-Soviet pact was expressed by Chancellor Hitler in a speech to the Reichstag on May 21, in which he outlined a 13-point program of foreign policy.³¹ He demanded equality for Germany, adding that "this equality of rights must extend to all functions and all rights of property in international life." He declared that Germany's policy toward the Versailles Treaty—as represented by the proclamation of rearmament—applied only to those sections of the treaty which "discriminate morally and practically against the German nation." The German government, he declared, would "scrupulously observe every treaty voluntarily signed by them, even if it was drawn up before they took over the government and power. They will therefore, in particular, observe and fulfill all obligations arising out of the Locarno pact so long as the other parties to the treaty are also willing to adhere to the said pact." Turning to the demilitarized zone in the Rhineland, he said that Germany regarded respect of this zone as "an extremely difficult contribution for a sovereign state to make to the appeasement of

29. Sir John Simon to Sir Eric Phipps, May 3, 1935. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 30.

30. Sir John Simon to Sir Eric Phipps, May 10, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Europe." He made no reference to a multilateral Eastern pact, but stated that Germany was ready to conclude non-aggression pacts with its "various neighboring states, and to supplement them by all provisions which aim at isolating the combatants and localizing the war-makers."

Hitler's speech raised a number of questions in the minds of the British. On May 23 Sir John Simon instructed Sir Eric Phipps to discover the precise meaning of the phrase regarding "equality of rights"; to ascertain whether Hitler's reference to sections of the Versailles Treaty which "discriminate morally and practically against the German nation" was intended to keep open the questions of the Rhineland demilitarized zone, colonial mandates, international rivers, and Austria; and to inquire how Hitler proposed to implement his offer of non-aggression pacts with neighboring states.³²

GERMAN MEMORANDUM OF MAY 25, 1935

The German government had meanwhile been studying the terms of the Franco-Soviet pact, and on May 25 submitted a memorandum to the Locarno powers regarding the relation between that pact and the Locarno Treaty.³³ The Franco-Soviet pact, according to the memorandum, was based on a hypothesis which would never be realized, "for Germany has no intention of taking any aggressive action against the U.S.S.R." Germany's principal objection to the pact was that France claimed the right, in the event of a Soviet-German conflict, to "decide unilaterally and at her own discretion who is the aggressor," and to take military action against Germany even if it could cite no report or decision of the League Council. The German government expressed the hope that all the Locarno powers would agree with it in recognizing that the Locarno Treaty could not "legally be modified or interpreted" by the fact that one of the signatories had concluded a treaty with a third party. On May 29—the day when von Hoesch communicated this memorandum to Sir John Simon—he also presented a draft of Germany's suggestions regarding a Western air pact.³⁴

On May 31 Sir Eric Phipps informed Sir John Simon that the German government, in answer to Britain's questions of May 23, did not see how it could further clarify Hitler's Reichstag speech "by means of definitions."³⁵ It explained, however, that Germany could not return to the League until its

international status, as compared with that of other great powers, implied no "differentiation to its disadvantage." Existing differentiation "could not of course be removed by the purely formal separation" of the Covenant from the Versailles Treaty. Germany did not intend to apply the methods it had used in the case of rearmament to other "discriminatory" Versailles provisions; "but the possibility of revision by means of a peaceful understanding was to be kept open so far as such revision may appear necessary in the course of further developments." With respect to the Eastern pact, the German government—which had been urged by the British to present its own draft—merely stated that it had not yet received the French and Soviet proposals. France made an effort to placate Germany on June 4,³⁶ when M. Laval informed the German Ambassador in Paris that his government "appreciated to the full" the suggestions made in the von Neurath note of March 26,³⁷ which might "profitably serve" as a basis of negotiations.

FRENCH NOTE OF JUNE 25, 1935

On June 25 the French government replied in detail to the German memorandum of May 25 concerning the Franco-Soviet pact.³⁸ The pact, it contended, remained "uncontestably" within the limits fixed by the Covenant and the Locarno Treaty, and France did not—as argued by Germany—claim the right to decide unilaterally and at its own discretion who was the aggressor in a hypothetical Soviet-German conflict. Locarno, said the French memorandum, "is so much an essential basis of the general policy of France that no French government could have risked, by their own action, the introduction of an element of doubt with regard to it."

On July 5 Sir Samuel Hoare, who had meanwhile succeeded Sir John Simon as Foreign Secretary, informed Ambassador von Hoesch that the British government was "in entire agreement" with the views expressed by France in its June 25 note, and was satisfied that there was "nothing in the Franco-Soviet treaty which either conflicts with the Locarno treaty or modifies its operation in any way."³⁹ A similar view was taken by the two other Locarno powers—Italy⁴⁰ and Belgium.⁴¹

36. Note from the French Government to the German Government respecting the proposed Eastern Pact, June 4, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

37. Cf. p. 80.

38. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 42.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

40. Memorandum by the Italian Government communicated to the German Government on July 15, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

41. Aide-mémoire communicated by the Belgian Government to the German Government on July 19, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

34. Sir John Simon to Sir Eric Phipps, May 29, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 39. The German draft of a Western air pact has not been published.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

ANGLO-GERMAN SKIRMISHES

Negotiations for a Western air pact were meanwhile making little progress. On July 23 Sir Samuel Hoare, in the course of an interview with von Hoesch, said that "as a practical man," he had come to the conclusion that the desire of both Britain and Germany for a Western air pact was unattainable "if there was no simultaneous progress along the line of the Eastern pact."⁴² These arguments were renewed in more pressing terms on July 29, when the British Foreign Secretary reminded the acting counselor of the German embassy, Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, of the von Neurath note of March 26, the German communication of April 12 to the Stresa conference, and Hitler's offer of non-aggression pacts with neighboring states on May 21.⁴³ Sir Samuel told Baron Marschall that, according to British understanding, these neighboring states were the Soviet Union, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Czechoslovakia, all of which were already covered by the general non-aggression obligations which Germany had assumed under the Anti-War Pact. The German government was thus not being asked to do anything new, "but that did not mean that the confirmation of what, in practice, already largely existed would not at this time have an important psychological and calming effect."

On August 1 Sir Samuel again discussed the status of the Western air pact with von Hoesch, and once more stressed the necessity of opening the Eastern pact negotiations "if we were to have any chance of starting upon the air pact."⁴⁴ The German Ambassador then read a verbal communication⁴⁵ in which his government stated it could not agree with the juridical point of view expressed in the French note of June 25 and endorsed by Britain, Italy and Belgium. It did not think, however, that any useful purpose would be served by a further exchange of juridical memoranda. Sir Samuel said he assumed "that it meant that the German government did not henceforth intend to regard the Franco-Russian treaty as an obstacle in the way of an Eastern pact." Von Hoesch replied that Germany still maintained its legal position and would want to present it in future negotiations.

The confusion created by Anglo-German exchanges regarding the proposed Eastern pact was fully revealed in an aide-mémoire communicated by Mr. Newton, British Chargé d'Affaires in Ber-

lin, to Baron von Neurath on August 5.⁴⁶ Von Hoesch, said Mr. Newton, had given the impression in London that, as a result of the Franco-Soviet pact, Baron von Neurath's communication of April 12 concerning a multilateral Eastern pact had lapsed, and that the German government's commitments in Eastern Europe were now limited to the offer of bilateral non-aggression pacts with neighboring states made by Hitler on May 21. This seemed to indicate, Mr. Newton continued, that, instead of a multilateral regional pact, Germany merely intended to conclude a series of bilateral treaties; and that the neighboring states covered by this offer included only states with contiguous territory—namely Lithuania (subject to settlement of the Memel controversy), Poland (which already had a 10-year non-aggression pact with Germany), and Czechoslovakia. If this interpretation was correct, then the situation created by Germany's attitude was, in British opinion, "most discouraging" and "deplorable." Britain "naturally" considered that Baron von Neurath's communication of April 12 was "a binding undertaking" by the German government to conclude a multilateral non-aggression pact, and felt "entitled to expect" the German government to adhere to it. If Germany limited itself to a narrow interpretation of the term "neighboring states," there was no hope that the French government would be satisfied and that any advance could be made in general negotiations. Britain therefore earnestly hoped that the German government would agree to include in a collective non-aggression pact not only Lithuania, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but also Latvia, Estonia and the Soviet Union.

No reply to this aide-mémoire was received until August 22, when Herr von Buelow, German Foreign Secretary, told Mr. Newton that Hitler had intimated he could not define his attitude "in a question of such intricacy" until after the holidays, when he could consult other members of the government and experts.⁴⁷ The earliest probable date for such discussions would be shortly after the Nazi party congress in Nuremberg, ending on September 16. When Mr. Newton expressed "surprise and disappointment," von Buelow "could only explain that the holiday season was by tradition much more completely observed in Germany than in England."

On August 26 Prince von Bismarck, German Chargé d'Affaires in London, informed Sir Samuel Hoare that the German government would be

42. Sir Samuel Hoare to Mr. Newton, British Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin, July 23, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

43. Sir Samuel Hoare to Mr. Newton, July 29, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

44. Sir Samuel Hoare to Mr. Newton, August 1, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

47. Mr. Newton to Sir Samuel Hoare, August 22, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

unable to answer the British aide-mémoire until the beginning of October.⁴⁸ Sir Samuel Hoare told Prince von Bismarck that the British government "would much regret this postponement." He pointed out, with a touch of impatience, that both Britain and France had been awaiting an answer from Germany not merely since August 5, but since France's June 4 note to Germany, "which was long before the holiday season."

This reminder had no noticeable effect on Germany. On September 16 Baron von Neurath, who had just returned from the Nuremberg congress, had a conversation "of a most friendly nature" with Sir Eric Phipps, in the course of which he said that, in view of the general situation, he did not propose to answer Britain's inquiries about the Eastern pact "till 'quieter times' come." Meanwhile, he assured the British Ambassador, "Germany did not mean to attack anyone, even Lithuania."⁴⁹

When Italy's Ethiopian campaign was already in full swing, M. Laval, who had never been more than lukewarm toward the Franco-Soviet pact and had favored a direct understanding with Germany, made another attempt to reopen negotiations for an Eastern treaty. On November 15 he informed the German Ambassador in Paris that he "would be obliged" to submit the Franco-Soviet pact to Parliament for ratification at an early date, and would welcome a German decision to resume conversations for collective security on the basis of the London declaration of February 3. M. François-Poncet, French Ambassador in Berlin, made a similar statement to Baron von Neurath, and was instructed to see Hitler following the latter's return to Berlin on November 21, when he was to "expand on the desire of M. Laval to bring Germany back into the collective system."⁵⁰ Hitler's reply to these overtures was that Germany could not negotiate "at all pending a settlement of the Abyssinian question."⁵¹

Sir Samuel Hoare, seconding M. Laval's efforts, instructed Sir Eric Phipps on December 5 to call on Hitler and, if the Chancellor did not agree to immediate reopening of negotiations, "it is desirable that he should state to you clearly the reasons why he has now withdrawn his previous offers and the circumstances in which he would be prepared to renew them."⁵² "In any case," the British

Ambassador was to ascertain "what concrete meaning" Hitler attached to negotiations on the basis of his 13-point program of May 21.

In the course of the interview which Sir Eric Phipps obtained on December 13, Hitler declared that the Franco-Soviet "military alliance" directed against Germany "had rendered any air pact out of the question, for the bringing into the picture of Russia had completely upset the balance of power in Europe." He referred to Russia's enormous strength on land and in the air, and remarked that "Berlin might easily in a few hours be reduced to a heap of ashes by a Russian air attack before the League or any other body had even begun to discuss the question of how to deal with it." Hitler referred to the reply he had given during the Stresa conference to Sir John Simon's question regarding the Eastern pact, remarking that "he had not at that time realized the full meaning of the Franco-Soviet alliance. His main objection to the alliance is the fact that each party reserves to itself the right to decide in the last resort who the eventual aggressor is. For instance, in the event of war between Russia and Poland, if Germany came to the latter's assistance, she would be dubbed the aggressor by France and treated as such. This even impaired the efficacy and value of the Treaty of Locarno." Sir Eric told the Chancellor that the British government "would be greatly disappointed at his negative attitude over the air pact and air limitation."⁵³

Soon after he had succeeded Sir Samuel Hoare at the Foreign Office, Mr. Eden made a determined attempt to reach an understanding with Germany. On January 8 he asked Sir Eric Phipps to inform Hitler that he shared the views so often expressed by the German Chancellor regarding the importance of "a close and confidential understanding and collaboration between Great Britain, France and Germany," and hoped their two governments would keep this objective closely in view. Sir Eric was instructed to tell Hitler that his interview of December 13 was "the first occasion on which the German government have claimed that the Franco-Soviet treaty has rendered any air pact out of the question," and to point out that on May 29—the day when von Hoesch submitted the German memorandum regarding the treaty's effect on Locarno—he presented the German draft of a Western air pact.⁵⁴

On January 14, following an interview with Baron von Neurath, Sir Eric reported that Hitler on December 13 had only meant to say that the

p. 56.

49. Sir Eric Phipps to Sir Samuel Hoare, September 16, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

50. Sir Eric Phipps to Sir Samuel Hoare, November 19, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

51. Sir Samuel Hoare to Sir Eric Phipps, December 5, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Sir Eric Phipps to Sir Samuel Hoare, December 16, 1935. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

54. Mr. Eden to Sir Eric Phipps, January 8, 1936. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Franco-Soviet pact "had rendered an air *limitation* agreement impossible for the present, but that he was ready in principle to conclude an air pact between Locarno powers." Neurath added, however, that "of course the moment seems inopportune for such conversations *à cinq*," owing to strained relations between Britain and Italy, the two Locarno guarantors.⁵⁵

THE STRUGGLE FOR A BALANCE OF POWER

The funeral of King George V of Britain provided an unusual opportunity for diplomatic conversations both in London, where representatives of the principal European states called on King Edward VIII and Mr. Eden to tender their condolences, and in Paris, where many of them broke their homeward journey to confer with M. Flandin, who had just succeeded M. Laval as Foreign Minister. The Paris conversations—in which Germany, Italy, Poland and Hungary did not participate—were chiefly concerned with the future of Austria and the consequences of a German move to end demilitarization of the Rhineland, which was regarded as inevitable.

Negotiations regarding Austria were directed at the formation of an Eastern European bloc composed of the Little Entente states—Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia—which, it was hoped, might replace Italy as official defender of Austrian independence against the designs of Nazi Germany. In the course of these negotiations Premier Hodza of Czechoslovakia offered to reduce Austria's economic dependence on Germany and Italy by opening Little Entente markets to Austrian goods.⁵⁶ This plan encountered two main obstacles: the reluctance of the Schuschnigg government to renounce all hope of Hapsburg restoration, which Rumania and Yugoslavia—unlike Czechoslovakia—regard as more dangerous than German absorption of Austria; and the unwillingness of Yugoslavia—which shares Hitler's hostility to communism and has distrusted France since King Alexander's Marseilles assassination in 1934—to take any action which might close the profitable German market to Yugoslav trade, already hard hit by League sanctions against Italy.

These Danubian negotiations, which pointedly excluded Germany and Italy, aroused the appre-

hensions of both countries. The Hitler government redoubled its efforts to encourage Yugoslavia's pro-German orientation; while Mussolini further cemented his ties with Austria and Hungary, both of which had refused to participate in League sanctions against Italy. At a conference held in Rome on March 20-23 Italy, Austria and Hungary reaffirmed the pledges of political, economic and cultural cooperation given in the Rome protocols of March 17, 1934;⁵⁷ decided to organize themselves into a group and to create a permanent organ of mutual consultation modeled on the periodic Little Entente conferences; agreed that, while it was advisable to develop economic relations with other Danubian states, this could be achieved only by means of bilateral treaties—thus excluding an understanding between Austria and the Little Entente as a unit, but not an Austro-Czechoslovak preferential trade treaty, which was concluded on March 10;⁵⁸ and undertook not to open negotiations with any other country concerning Danubian questions until they had consulted each other—thus barring a secret Italo-German or Austro-Little Entente accord.

Meanwhile, rumors that the Hitler government was preparing for remilitarization of the Rhineland in violation of Locarno caused feverish diplomatic exchanges between London, Paris and Brussels. On January 27 Mr. Eden had an exhaustive conversation with Baron von Neurath, who had come to London for King George's funeral.⁵⁹ The German Foreign Minister assured Mr. Eden that his government "fully intended to respect the treaty of Locarno. All that they asked was that others should observe it in the spirit as well as in the letter." Mr. Eden, in turn, told von Neurath that "on no account would His Majesty's Government do anything to injure or even to weaken Locarno," which it regarded as of the greatest value for the preservation of peace in Western Europe. Baron von Neurath replied that Germany's anxieties were not with the West. "Certainly," he said, "if the Franco-Soviet pact were ratified, this, combined with the pact which existed between Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia, and which meant that Germany was very vulnerable to joint action by those

55. Sir Eric Phipps to Mr. Eden, January 14, 1936. *Ibid.*, p. 63; Sir Eric Phipps to Mr. Eden, January 17, 1936. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

56. "The Problem of Central Europe again to the Forefront," *The Central European Observer* (Prague), February 21, 1936, p. 51; Georges Outlik, "Le Problème Autrichien," *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie* (Budapest), March 1936, p. 208; Maximilien Fenyő, "Les Voyages de M. Milan Hodža," *ibid.*, April 1936, p. 304.

57. For the texts of the three protocols signed in Rome on March 23, 1936, cf. *Corriere della Sera*, March 25, 1936. For an analysis of the 1934 Rome protocols, cf. Vera Micheles Dean, "Toward a New Balance of Power in Europe," *Foreign Policy Reports*, May 9, 1934, p. 65.

58. *New York Times*, March 11, 1936; *The Central European Observer* (Prague), March 20, 1936, p. 81; "L'Aboutissement des Négociations Austro-Tchécoslovaques," *L'Europe Centrale* (Prague), March 14, 1936, p. 170.

59. Mr. Eden to Sir Eric Phipps, January 27, 1936. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 64.

two powers from the air, would render the negotiation of an air pact and an air limitation agreement more difficult." He emphasized "that he did not say impossible"—and gave no hint that ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact would lead to German denunciation of Locarno.

On February 24 Mr. Eden told the House of Commons that "eighteen years after the close of the War—a war which those of us who were of age to fight in it were assured was a war to end war—we find ourselves confronted with the same problems, dreadfully similar in character and in portent with those of the years before 1914." He sought to reassure Germany by declaring that collective security was not synonymous with encirclement. "His Majesty's Government will take their full share in the policy of collective security; they will have neither lot nor part in encirclement."⁶⁰

When von Hoesch called on February 27 to inquire whether the British government had any particular step in mind to improve Anglo-German relations, Mr. Eden said he regretted the tendency of the German press to suggest that Britain was participating in an attempt to encircle Germany.⁶¹ "So far as the Franco-Soviet pact was concerned," he said, "it seemed to me that Germany was taking that event too tragically." He reiterated his desire to open negotiations for an air pact, but von Hoesch referred once more to the complications created by the Italo-Ethiopian war.

Von Neurath's reassurances to Eden on January 27 had failed to relieve the fears of the Belgian government, which urged France to strike a bargain with Hitler before it was too late, and barter permission to remilitarize the Rhineland for a Western pact limiting air armaments.⁶² Belgium's reluctance to follow in the wake of France's less conciliatory policy toward Germany, and its desire to cooperate with other small powers in case of crisis, were emphasized on March 1-3, when Polish Foreign Minister Beck visited Brussels, ostensibly to conclude a trade agreement.⁶³ This visit was also interpreted as a demonstration that Poland had not put all its diplomatic eggs in the German basket and would welcome conversations with other Western powers. Such a gesture seemed all the more necessary in Warsaw because of persistent reports that Ulrich von Hassel, German Ambassador in Rome, had sought to reach an un-

derstanding with Mussolini for simultaneous denunciation of Locarno by Germany and Italy and formation of a five-power bloc—comprising Germany, Italy, Poland, Austria and Hungary—as a counter-weight to a possible Franco-British-Soviet combination.⁶⁴

THE DE JOUVENEL INTERVIEW

France had meanwhile received one of Hitler's periodic invitations to bury the hatchet. On February 21 a French journalist, Bertrand de Jouvenel, representing *Paris-Midi*, had obtained an interview with Chancellor Hitler. In the course of this interview Hitler declared that the French and German peoples "are in no way hereditary enemies." France, he said, could if it wished "put an end forever to the 'German peril' which your children, from generation to generation, learn to fear. You can cancel the fearful mortgage which weighs upon the history of France. This chance is offered to you; if you do not take it, think of your responsibility to your children. You have before you a Germany 90 per cent of whose population has full confidence in its leader, and this leader says to you: 'Let us be friends.'" He added, however, that the "more than deplorable" Franco-Soviet pact "would naturally create a new situation. . . . France is allowing herself to be caught in the diplomatic web of a power whose only aim is to create in all the great European states a disorder from which she will benefit."⁶⁵

This interview—regarded in French political circles as an attempt to block ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact⁶⁶—was published in *Paris-Midi* on February 28, the day after the pact had been ratified in the Chamber of Deputies by a vote of 353 to 164. The rumor circulated in Paris that the delay in publication had been due to interference by the Quai d'Orsay. M. de Jouvenel, however, stated on March 8 that on February 22 he had told Herr von Ribbentrop, Hitler's personal adviser on foreign affairs, that the interview would appear in the Sunday edition of *Paris-Soir*⁶⁷ on March 1, and that publication had thus actually taken place ahead of schedule.⁶⁸

64. Frederick T. Birchall, *New York Times*, February 23, 1936; Arnaldo Cortesi, *ibid.*, February 25, 1936; John Elliott, *New York Herald Tribune*, February 24, 1936.

65. *Paris-Midi*, February 28, 1936; also Translation of the Important Passages of the Interview given by Herr Hitler to M. Bertrand de Jouvenel, transmitted by Sir George Clerk to Mr. Eden, February 28, 1936. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 69.

66. Statement by Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Paris-Midi*, March 8, 1936.

67. *Paris-Midi* and *Paris-Soir* are owned by the same publisher.

68. De Jouvenel, *Paris-Midi*, March 8, 1936.

60. Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, Vol. 309, No. 35, February 24, 1936, pp. 83, 85.

61. Mr. Eden to Sir Eric Phipps, February 27, 1936. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 68.

62. Augur, *New York Times*, February 26, 1936.

63. Georges-A. Détry, "Les Conversations Belgo-Polonaises," *Le Temps* (Paris), March 4 and 5, 1936.

While French opinion was on the whole inclined to discount Hitler's conciliatory remarks to de Jouvenel, "the feeling that nothing can be lost and much might be gained from a full and candid re-examination of Franco-German problems" appeared to be gaining ground in Paris.⁶⁹ On February 25, during the debates on the Franco-Soviet pact, M. Flandin had told the Chamber of Deputies that France was willing to submit the question of the pact's alleged incompatibility with Locarno to the Permanent Court of International Justice. He refused to admit that the pact could be used as a pretext for unilateral repudiation of Locarno, adding that it would be "a gratuitous insult" to attribute to Germany the intention of provoking a conflict with the Locarno signatories "at a moment when its responsible leaders have expressed their will to peace."⁷⁰

On February 29, following publication of the de Jouvenel interview, M. François-Poncet was instructed to request "d'urgence" an audience with Hitler, and ask him to clarify the basis on which he thought it possible to effect a rapprochement "which France desired as much as Germany."⁷¹ On March 2, during an audience at which Baron von Neurath was present, Hitler told M. François-Poncet that his *Paris-Midi* interview had taken place ten days before ratification of the Franco-Soviet pact, and that this "*fait accompli*" had changed the whole situation."⁷² When the French Ambassador pointed out the "deplorable impression that would be created by failure to implement offers of friendship made in press interviews," Hitler said he would soon acquaint the French government with "proposals of a precise character"—which took the somewhat startling form of the German memorandum of March 7—and suggested that, in the meantime, the negotiations should be kept secret. On March 3 Premier Sarraut submitted the Franco-Soviet pact to the Senate for ratification.⁷³

EDEN-FLANDIN CONVERSATIONS IN GENEVA

The League Committee of Eighteen, charged with the application of sanctions, had meanwhile assembled in Geneva on March 2 to consider the

possibility of an oil embargo against Italy. Mr. Eden surprised the committee by declaring that Britain favored an oil embargo and was prepared to join in its early application if other supplying and transporting League powers—irrespective of action by the United States—were ready to do likewise.⁷⁴ This British move followed a plea by M. Flandin that the League Committee of Thirteen, composed of all Council members except Italy, should make one more attempt at conciliation within the framework of the League Covenant.⁷⁵ It was first reported that, if the League's conciliation proposals were not accepted by Italy and Ethiopia within 48 hours, the Committee of Eighteen would proceed with an oil embargo.⁷⁶ On March 3, however, the Council addressed an urgent appeal to both belligerents for the immediate opening of negotiations "within the framework of the League of Nations and in the spirit of the Covenant," and announced that it would meet a week later—on March 10—to hear the replies of Italy and Ethiopia.⁷⁷

This new delay in applying an oil embargo was due to the fact that Italy, heartened by victories on the northern front, had again resorted to threats in the hope of averting more drastic sanctions. The French government was informed that, if an oil embargo were imposed, Italy would withdraw from the League; relinquish its obligations under the Locarno Treaty; and denounce the Franco-Italian military agreement of January 1935, which had enabled France to transfer troops from the Italian military agreement of January 1935, which was summoned for Saturday, March 7, to determine the country's future course.

Italy's threat to jettison Locarno—taken in conjunction with reports of Italo-German negotiations for simultaneous denunciation of the treaty—seriously alarmed the French government. On March 2, in Geneva, M. Flandin asked Mr. Eden whether Britain would give France additional guarantees of military assistance against German aggression on the Rhine if Italy denounced Locarno. France feared not only that Italy would default on its Locarno obligations, but that Germany would seize this opportunity to demand complete revision of the Western European *status quo*.⁷⁹

France's request for additional British guaran-

69. *The Times*, March 4, 1936. Cf. also "Pour la Clarté," *Le Temps*, March 3, 1936.

70. France, *Journal Officiel, Débats Parlementaires*, Chambre des Députés, February 25, 1936, cited, p. 583.

71. Declaration of the French Government, March 8, 1936. *Le Temps*, March 9, 1936.

72. *Ibid.*; and Sir Eric Phipps to Mr. Eden, March 4, 1936, Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 71.

73. The French Senate ratified the Franco-Soviet pact on March 12, 1936.

74. *The Times*, March 3, 1936; *New York Times*, March 3, 1936.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

77. League of Nations, *Report to the Council by the Committee of Thirteen*, Geneva, April 18, 1936, C.176.M.112.1936.VII.

78. *The Times*, March 6, 1936.

79. *Ibid.*, March 5 and 6, 1936.

tees was considered by the British Cabinet on March 6, following Mr. Eden's return from Geneva. The British apparently agreed with the French in believing that Italy's defection would reopen the question of the demilitarized Rhineland zone.⁸⁰ Some sections of British opinion favored direct conversations with Germany and voluntary renunciation of the zone, instead of waiting for a Nazi *fait accompli*. In an eleventh-hour attempt to improve relations between the Locarno powers, Mr. Eden received von Hoesch at the Foreign Office the evening of March 6, and discussed the possibility of translating "hopes into facts" by opening negotiations for a Western air pact.⁸¹ Von Hoesch said he would communicate this suggestion to Hitler. As he left, he told Mr. Eden that a special messenger was on the way from Berlin with an important declaration from the Chancellor, and requested an interview for the following morning to present the message. This message—delivered by Baron von Neurath to the diplomatic representatives of the Locarno powers in Berlin and by German ambassadors in London, Rome, Paris and Brussels at eleven o'clock on Saturday morning, the exact moment when Hitler began his speech to the Reichstag—announced Germany's denunciation of the Rhineland demilitarization clauses of the Versailles and Locarno treaties, and proposed negotiations for a 25-year non-aggression pact in Western Europe, to be accompanied or followed by the Reich's return to Geneva. While Hitler was speaking, German troops, described by the Nazis as "symbolic" and as "garrisons of peace," were entering the Rhineland zone, demilitarized since 1919.

THE END OF LOCARNO

The die had been cast in Berlin early that historic week. On March 2—the day M. Flandin discussed the Locarno situation with Mr. Eden in Geneva—Hitler had summoned a meeting at the Chancellery, attended by Goebbels, Goering, von Ribbentrop, General Blomberg, Minister of Defense, and Admiral Raeder, Minister of the Navy.⁸² It was reported that Baron von Neurath, Dr. Schacht, Acting Minister of Economics, and General Fritsch, chief of the General Staff—all of whom opposed the Rhineland coup—were not present. At this meeting it was decided to remili-

tarize the Rhineland and summon the Reichstag on Friday, March 13, by which time it was expected that the French Senate would have ratified the Franco-Soviet pact. France's demand for additional British guarantees against German aggression on the Rhine caused Hitler to advance his plans. The Nazis feared that Britain might soon be pledged to apply sanctions automatically the moment German troops entered the Rhineland. British public opinion, it was thought, would be placated by Hitler's proposal for a Western non-aggression pact and his offer to return to Geneva.⁸³ At no time did the Hitler government signify the intention of submitting its case against the Franco-Soviet pact to judicial decisions, as provided by the Locarno Treaty in case of conflict between the signatories.

The extent to which Hitler's decision to remilitarize the Rhineland was determined by internal politics has been variously appraised. Non-German observers agree that the economic and political situation had reached an impasse, and that a dramatic success in foreign affairs was imperatively needed by the hard-pressed dictatorship.⁸⁴ The floating debt, never officially estimated, was reported to have reached astronomical proportions; the shortage of certain foodstuffs, notably butter and eggs, was acute; the lack of foreign exchange and the consequent difficulty of importing essential raw materials threatened the further progress of rearmament, which had been largely responsible for the decline in unemployment.⁸⁵ Dr. Schacht, representing the conservative interests of German bankers and industrialists, had urged reconciliation with Britain and return to Geneva, for the ultimate purpose of securing a substantial British loan; had advocated improvement in trade with the Soviet Union, one of Germany's best markets in pre-Nazi days; and had demanded curtailment of expenditures for party purposes.⁸⁶ Schacht's policy antagonized both the conservative Nazis who derided the League and hated communism, and the party radicals, already disillusioned by the failure of the government to effect genuine socialization. Hitler apparently decided to break this internal deadlock between conservatives and radicals and simultaneously divert public opinion from internal difficulties by remilitarizing the Rhineland—a step unquestionably favored by the majority of the people, irrespective of their attitude toward National So-

80. *Ibid.*, March 6 and 7, 1936.

81. Mr. Eden to Sir Eric Phipps, March 6, 1936. Great Britain, *Diplomatic Discussions directed towards Securing an European Settlement*, cited, p. 72.

82. "Behind the Crisis: Why the Fuehrer Acted," *The Times*, March 10, 1936; *Christian Science Monitor*, March 15, 1936; "Herr Hitler's Motives," *The Economist* (London), March 14, 1936, p. 583.

83. "Behind the Crisis: Why the Fuehrer Acted," cited.

84. *Ibid.*; Anne O'Hare McCormick, *New York Times*, March 18, 1936; Mildred S. Wertheimer, "Nazi Germany Means War," *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, April 24, 1936.

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Der Deutsche Volkswirt* (Berlin), February 28, 1936.

cialism.⁸⁷ Remilitarization, moreover, offered an opportunity to appease the predominantly Catholic and liberal Rhineland, where the feud between conservative and radical Nazis was particularly acute, and Nazi persecution of Catholics had produced an alarming reaction against the régime.⁸⁸ The German masses, shut off by censorship from unbiased news of the outside world, were for the most part unaware of the effect that denunciation of Locarno might create abroad, and may have sincerely believed Hitler's assertions that this way lay peace.⁸⁹

GERMAN MEMORANDUM OF MARCH 7

The German memorandum of March 7 contended that the Franco-Soviet pact was "exclusively" directed against Germany; that the obligations undertaken by France in this pact were incompatible with its obligations under the Locarno Treaty; that by promising to aid the Soviet Union against aggression in the absence of a unanimous decision by the League Council, France had gone beyond the provisions of Article XVI of the League Covenant; and that it had destroyed the political system of Locarno not only in theory, but in fact. The Locarno Treaty having "lost its inner meaning and ceased in practice to exist," Germany was no longer bound "by this dissolved treaty." The German government had consequently remilitarized the Rhineland zone, "in accordance with the fundamental right of a nation to secure its frontiers and ensure its possibilities of defense."

At the same time, in order "to establish beyond doubt the purely defensive character of these measures, as well as to express their unchangeable longing for a real pacification of Europe between states which are equals in rights and equally respected," the German government made the following proposals:

1. Negotiations with France and Belgium for the creation of a new demilitarized zone on both sides of their respective frontiers. Such a zone would have involved demolition of fortifications constructed by France and Belgium along the German border since the World War.

2. Conclusion of a 25-year non-aggression pact by Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands—if the latter so desired—to be guaranteed, like Locarno, by Britain and Italy.

87. "Behind the Crisis: Why the Fuehrer Acted," cited; *New York Times*, March 10, 1936; "A Salutary Nervousness," *The Economist*, March 7, 1936, p. 524.

88. Anne O'Hare McCormick, *New York Times*, March 18, 1936.

89. Pierre Frédérrix, "Les Masses Allemandes et la Dénonciation de Locarno," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, March 21, 1936, p. 297.

3. Conclusion of a Western air pact "calculated to prevent in an automatic and effective manner the danger of sudden air attacks."

4. Negotiation of non-aggression pacts—modeled on the 10-year German-Polish pact of 1933—with states bordering Germany in the east, including Lithuania, which had in the past few months "corrected" its attitude toward Memel. This proposal made no reference to the Soviet Union, which has no common frontier with the Reich, or to Austria and Czechoslovakia, bordering on Germany in the south and southeast. On March 10, after Sir Austen Chamberlain, former British Foreign Secretary and one of the negotiators of the Locarno Treaty, had asked in the House of Commons whether Austria was included in the German offer of non-aggression pacts, and Mr. Eden had answered in the negative,⁹⁰ Hitler gave an interview in Munich to G. Ward Price, Berlin correspondent of the fascist London *Daily Mail*, in which he stated that both Austria and Czechoslovakia came within the scope of his offer.⁹¹

5. Germany's return to the League of Nations, on the understanding that "in the course of a reasonable period the question of colonial equality of rights and that of the separation of the League Covenant from its Versailles setting may be clarified through friendly negotiations." The German memorandum did not make it clear whether the Reich would demand return of its former colonies, or merely equal right of access to colonial markets and raw materials.

HITLER'S REICHSTAG SPEECH

In his address to the Reichstag on March 7 Hitler justified remilitarization of the Rhineland by elaborating his fears of communism.⁹² The Bolshevik revolution, he said, had brought Russia into philosophical and religious conflict with neighboring states, making it "impossible to construct a connecting bridge." He reiterated his refusal to cooperate with communism, and to allow "the gruesome Communist international dictatorship of hate to descend upon the German people." He shuddered at the thought of the chaos which would be wrought in Europe by "the outbreak of this destructive Asiatic world conception, which strikes at all hitherto recognized values." He deplored the fact that, in spite of his repeated efforts to reach an understanding with France, the French government had concluded a military alliance with the Soviet Union, which he characterized as a "fathomless tragedy," fraught with unpredictable consequences. The introduction of this "gigantic empire into the Central European field of opera-

90. Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, Vol. 309, No. 45, March 9, 1936, p. 1817.

91. *The Times*, March 11, 1936.

92. For text, cf. *Voelkische Beobachter*, March 8, 1936; *New York Times*, March 8, 1936.

tion," he said, "destroys every real European balance of power."

Hitler declared that, in his opinion, Europe should be divided into two parts: the area of independent, self-sustaining national states with which Germany is bound "a hundredfold" by its history and culture; and the area governed "by that intolerant Bolshevik doctrine which lays claim to general international rule, a doctrine which preaches destruction even to the most eternal and sacred values of this life and the life hereafter."

While denouncing communism, Hitler declared that Germany did not want war, and was ready to make its contribution to European civilization and peace. The Reich, he argued, has two problems which must be solved if peace is to be maintained—economic welfare and political equality. In Germany, he said, "67,000,000 people are living on a very restricted and not everywhere fertile area"—pointing out that the Germans have 18 per cent less ground per capita than the Russians. The Germans "are no less industrious than other European peoples and also no less insistent upon getting what they want. . . . They have exactly as little ambition to be shot dead heroically in pursuit of a shadow as have the French or English." Although the German economic problem is largely internal, it concerns other states "so far as the German people, by a solution of this question, is forced economically as a buyer or seller to be in connection with other peoples. And here it would be in the interest of the world to understand that . . . the cry for bread among a forty, fifty, or sixty million population is not a trumped-up piece of maliciousness of a régime . . . but is the natural expression of the necessities of the struggle for existence." With regard to political equality Hitler declared that the Germans could solve their economic problems only if they possessed a feeling of political security and equality in their relations with other peoples. "It is impossible to deal with or even lead a people possessed of honor and of bravery forever as if it were made up of helots. . . . If the German people is to be of any value for European cooperation, it can have this value only as an honor-loving, hence equal, partner." In conclusion, Hitler announced the dissolution of the Reichstag and the calling of new elections, in which he summoned the German people to support him in his "struggle for a new peace."

DID THE FRANCO-SOVIET PACT VIOLATE LOCARNO?

The immediate pretext for Germany's remilitarization of the Rhineland was three-fold: that demilitarization had been "a result of the dictated Treaty of Versailles and of a sequence of severe acts of oppression suffered by the German people as a result of that treaty";⁹³ that the Franco-Soviet pact violated the Locarno Treaty, which was con-

sequently no longer binding on the Reich; and that the Franco-Soviet pact so altered the European situation as to release the Reich of its Locarno obligations. Of these three contentions, the last was by far the most strongly pressed after March 7.

Did the Franco-Soviet pact violate the Locarno Treaty of 1925? By Article 1 of this treaty—which was first suggested by the Reich and not imposed on it—Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Belgium "collectively and severally" guaranteed maintenance of the existing frontiers between Germany and Belgium, and Germany and France, and observance of Articles 42 and 43 of the Versailles Treaty, which respectively provided for demilitarization of the Rhineland and prohibited the construction of fortifications in that zone.⁹⁴ In Article 2, Germany and Belgium, and Germany and France undertook not to attack or invade each other, subject to two principal exceptions: legitimate self-defense, interpreted as resistance to violation of Article 1 of the Locarno Treaty and Articles 42 or 43 of the Versailles Treaty, if such violation "constitutes an unprovoked act of aggression and by reason of the assembly of armed forces in the demilitarized zone immediate action is necessary"; or action taken in pursuance of Articles XV and XVI of the League Covenant. In Article 3, Germany and Belgium, and Germany and France agreed to settle all controversies by peaceful means. Article 4 provides that if one of the parties alleges violation of Article 2 of the Locarno Treaty or Articles 42 or 43 of the Versailles Treaty, it shall bring the question at once before the League Council. As soon as the Council is satisfied that such violation or breach has been committed, it shall so notify the signatories, which severally agree that in such a case they will come immediately to the assistance of the complainant power. In case of flagrant violation or breach of the Locarno and Versailles provisions, each of the contracting parties undertook immediately to come to the aid of the state against which such violation or breach had been directed, "as soon as the said power has been able to satisfy itself that this violation constitutes an unprovoked act of aggression and by reason either of the crossing of the frontier or the outbreak of hostilities or of the assembly of armed forces in the demilitarized zone immediate action is necessary." This article envisaged action by each signatory on its own initiative,

94. Great Britain, *Final Protocol of the Locarno Conference, 1925 (and Annexes) together with Treaties between France and Poland and France and Czechoslovakia, Locarno, October 16, 1925* (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925), Miscellaneous No. 11 (1925), Cmd. 2525, p. 7. For an analysis of the Locarno treaties, cf. Karl Strupp, *Das Werk von Locarno* (Berlin, Gruyter, 1926).

93. Note addressed by Germany to the British government on April 1, 1936. *The Times*, April 2, 1936.

without waiting for a decision by the League Council—although the Council was subsequently to issue its findings. The Locarno powers thus undertook to give France, Belgium or Germany more prompt assistance than they are assured under the League Covenant, if one of them was the victim of flagrant aggression by the other.

No hope of such assistance was held out in 1925 to France's allies in Eastern Europe—Poland and Czechoslovakia. These countries—which then as now considered themselves more directly menaced by Germany than the Western powers—were expected to be satisfied with the general obligation to respect the territorial integrity and political independence of League members to be assumed by Germany when it entered the League and adhered to the Covenant. The League Covenant, however, makes no provision for the case when the Council, having been seized with a dispute which threatens war, fails to reach a unanimous decision binding on all League states; this is known as “the gap in the Covenant.” Article XV, paragraph 7 of the Covenant provides that, in such a case, League members reserve the right “to take such action as they shall consider necessary for the maintenance of right and justice.” An attempt to fill this “gap” with bilateral pledges of mutual assistance was made at Locarno in separate treaties concluded between France and Poland, and France and Czechoslovakia.⁹⁵ These treaties provided that, if the Council failed to reach a unanimous decision, and one of the contracting parties was then attacked without provocation, the other would immediately come to its assistance.

The Franco-Soviet pact of 1935, modeled on the Franco-Polish and Franco-Czechoslovak treaties of 1925, is couched in more precise language. This pact is to go into operation only when an act of unprovoked aggression has been committed against either France or the Soviet Union, and only if the League Council has failed to reach a unanimous decision as to the aggressor. If Hitler, as he has often said, has no aggressive intentions either in the West or the East, the Franco-Soviet pact will never become effective against Germany. Moreover, if the Council—which was unanimous in naming Italy as the aggressor—reaches a unanimous decision against Germany, then France and the Soviet Union, as League members, are obliged by Article XVI of the Covenant to take such measures against the aggressor as the Council may prescribe. This eventuality is also contemplated by Article 2 of the Locarno Treaty, which relieves France of its

pledge not to attack or invade Germany, provided it is acting under Article XVI of the Covenant.

Germany's principal objection to the Franco-Soviet pact, however, is that France and the Soviet Union undertake to come to each other's assistance if, in the absence of a unanimous Council decision, either one is the victim of unprovoked aggression by a third power. Yet under Article XV, paragraph 7 of the League Covenant, France and the Soviet Union already have the right “to take such action as they shall consider necessary for the maintenance of right and justice.” What they have done in the Franco-Soviet pact is to define in advance the action they will take in such an eventuality. Under Article 2 of the Locarno Treaty, moreover, France is relieved of its pledge not to attack or invade Germany if it is acting “in pursuance” of Article XV, paragraph 7 of the Covenant.

In its memorandum of March 7, the German government admitted that it had raised no objections in 1925 to the Franco-Polish and Franco-Czechoslovak treaties, when a compromise was being sought “between the renunciation of war by Germany and France, and the wish of France to maintain the obligations which she had already undertaken towards her allies.” The Franco-Soviet pact, according to the memorandum, had “created an entirely new situation,” and had “destroyed the political system” of Locarno. The essence of Germany's objections to the Franco-Soviet pact is not its alleged violation of the Locarno Treaty, but its effect on the European balance of power. What disturbs Hitler is that, if Germany should attack France, the latter may now call on the assistance of a strong military state in the East which had not entered into the balance of power calculations at Locarno; while, conversely, if Germany should seek expansion to the East, it would find the Soviet Union—which had no allies in 1925—reinforced by France in the West. This explains why Hitler felt it necessary to reoccupy the Rhineland. He wanted to remilitarize this zone and erect fortifications which would neutralize France and block French assistance to Eastern Europe. His argument that the Franco-Soviet pact had so altered the European balance of power as to relieve Germany of its Locarno obligations cuts both ways. It might be argued with equal pertinence that, by accepting Nazi rule in 1933, Germany so altered the political situation in Europe as to make it necessary for France and the Soviet Union to conclude a pact of mutual assistance against the day when Hitler might decide to carry out the foreign policy program of *Mein Kampf*.⁹⁶

95. Great Britain, *Final Protocol of the Locarno Conference*, pp. 57, 59.

96. The consequences of the Locarno crisis will be discussed in a forthcoming issue of *Foreign Policy Reports*.